The Black Cat

APRIL 1909

The Seduction of Singleton Worth
Frederick C. Glasdon

The Insuring of Mrs. Harrigan
James Francis Dwyer

A Light in the Desert
Clifford Howard

A Millionaire's Momentous Transaction
Fred S. Brown

The Hypnotized Ship
Edward Th. Cainon

The Fear Motif
Ethel Watts Mumford

Pen Pictures
(The Weirdest Land on Earth. No. III.)
James Francis Dwyer

Catechisms

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The Black Cat

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The Reduction of Singleton Worth.*

BY FREDERICK C. GLADDEN.

COMPREHEND quite perfectly," said the Hindoo doctor suavely. "You do not desire to be fatigued by the favorite modern method of undergoing a series of violent athletic exercises, combined with a severely plain diet. Very well — it is not necessary. My treatment entails no physical suffering nor inconvenience, and has invariably proved quite as efficacious. Be good enough to follow me."

Singleton Worth, bachelor, broker, fat, florid and forty-five, rose heavily and followed his lithe, slight, swarthy guide up a short staircase, along a narrow hall, at the end of which a heavy oaken door opened noiselessly, admitting them into a long, spacious chamber, which resembled, in general appearance, the cooling-off room of a Turkish bath establishment. There were a dozen or more leather couches, numerous lounging chairs of similar material, and several small tables upon which were placed smoking-utensils, illustrated magazines and papers. Otherwise the room was bare except for the thick rugs on the floor of polished hard wood. There were no pictures and no windows. It

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was lighted by incandescent bulbs placed at intervals in the walls, near the ceiling.

"Be seated," said Dr. Abkandah, courteously indicating a chair at one of the little tables, and seating himself at its opposite side. He touched a bell, and a Hindoo lad of about ten, clad in picturesque Oriental garments and wearing a huge turban, appeared. The doctor spoke a few words in the vernacular. The boy salaamed, disappeared and presently returned with small cups of coffee and nargilehs. He filled the latter deftly from a large jade jar and having seen that the pipes were properly lighted, vanished.

The doctor sipped his coffee meditatively, exhaling huge clouds of the fragrant Persian tobacco. His guest followed his example in silence, secretly wondering what was coming next, and somewhat perturbed in spirit. There was nothing in his surroundings to suggest an operating-room, and yet he had a curious inward sinking at the pit of his stomach as if he were about to submit to some severe physical ordeal. He recollected, too, with a spasm of uncontrollable regret, that he had not been at great pains to secure proper testimonials concerning the professional standing of the newly arrived practitioner, and that he was really possessed of no definite information on that head. It was true that, at the club of late, several men had told astonishing tales of extraordinary cures which had been effected in an incredibly short time by this much-heralded recent arrival. But these tales after all might be mere rumor, none of the cures authenticated, and the man a dangerous charlatan, for all he actually knew to the contrary. Unconquerable distrust welled up in his bosom. He leaned forward and drained the coffee-cup in a gulp. Then he composed himself to look with an appearance of tranquillity at the quiet little man opposite, before speaking. Dr. Abkandah's imperturbable demeanor relaxed somewhat. He even smiled, and Worth gave an involuntary gasp of relief as the doctor spoke.

"My treatment is of the most simple nature. I apprehend that you are already familiar with the theory, which many do not admit to be a fact, that each of us is possessed of a so-called astral body which, under certain conditions, by those who have

attained the power, may be projected to places far distant from the physical body, there to represent it in all things as if the physical body were actually present."

Worth smiled incredulously. "Oh, of course I've heard of that sort of thing. Never took much stock in it though. Never knew any one who did." He was quite himself now, quite at his ease, he felt. If this fellow was one of those Theosophist chaps, why he couldn't do any harm.

Dr. Abkandah bowed with the utmost politeness. "You may have occasion to change your mind, Mr. Worth," he said. "However, it is not important that you should do so now. In fact, it is quite as well that you should feel as you do on such matters, because you can then have the less unwillingness to submit to my treatment. I do not propose to send your astral body forth. On the contrary it will remain here and your consciousness will remain here with it. Your physical body will, however, go abroad. Its wanderings, which you must follow and observe mentally, may occasion you some uneasiness. But as I have already indicated, you will be conscious of no physical pain. That is all I am at liberty to explain to you. Do you still wish to undertake the treatment?"

Worth imagined he began to feel a little drowsy, but he certainly was extremely comfortable. This idea of sending his body out somewhere and leaving him quietly enjoying his coffee and pipe, appeared to him the very quintessence of excellent jesting. He resolved, however, to enter into the spirit of the joke.

"By all means, Doctor," he cried. "I should like nothing better."

Hardly had the words left his mouth when the room grew suddenly dark. He saw dimly, as through a thick mist, the shadowy outline of the doctor's form, erect and menacing as it appeared to his numbing faculties. He heard a strange chant — a weird clash of copper cymbals — there came a brilliant flash of violet light, thrice repeated. He gasped for breath, struggled to rise, and fell back in his chair unconscious.

When he came to himself the doctor had vanished and he was alone. At first he had some difficulty in realizing where he was. But gradually, as his thinking powers resumed their sway, the

recollection of his recent talk with the Hindoo doctor came to him. His mind was as clear as a bell, and he experienced with keen enjoyment a consciousness of mental power and alertness which he had never before possessed. Every object in the room stood forth in astonishing distinctness before his mental vision. With one rapid glance he completed and tabulated an exact inventory of its entire contents. The pipe which he had been smoking lay on the table at his hand beside the half-finished cup of coffee. He reached forth his hand to take up the pipe. It would be more correct to say that he attempted to reach forth his hand, for though he was painfully aware of the volition to do so, nothing happened. His hand did not move from the arm of the chair on which it was resting. He sprang to his feet — that is, he intended to spring to his feet — but again there was no resultant to the mental impulse. Again and again he endeavored, with all the force of his will, to compel his muscles to respond to the demands of his brain. But always with the same result. There was absolutely no response, and he remained seated, leaning back in his chair, not having changed the position of any portion of his body by the slightest fraction of an inch, from the time that he awoke. He became gradually aware of a curious but delicious sensation of perfect bodily ease. He felt as light as a feather and as if he might easily vault over a house. Or, rather, as his mind, working with lightning-like rapidity, told him, he felt no sensation at all. And yet he was in entire possession of all his intellectual faculties and therefore keenly alive to his sensations. His mind told him so. It also told him that this was all perfectly ridiculous. He laughed aloud at the extraordinary state of things. That is, he meant to laugh, but the laugh died in his throat, or would have died there if it had ever got that far, which it did not. He became angry, furious, and particularly so at that ass of a doctor! If he ever got hold of him! In the midst of all this perplexity he recalled the doctor's curious last remark:

"Your astral body will remain here and your consciousness will remain with it. Your physical body will, however, go abroad. Its wanderings, which you must follow and observe mentally, may occasion you some uneasiness —"

So this was what had happened to him. Of course! He might have guessed it before. Well, of all the confounded useless things he had ever heard of, an astral body was certainly the most abandoned concentration of futility. But his physical body — wandering abroad — and without any controlling mind! Great Heavens!

What would it do? "The Lord knows that old physical body always needed all the mind it could conveniently accumulate," soliloquized Worth. He was not to be left long in doubt on this subject, however, for he became almost immediately cognizant of the fact that things were happening elsewhere.

By just what intellectual or supernatural process he became aware of the events which followed and were borne in upon his inner consciousness, he was unable to determine to his own satisfaction. Even his wonderfully quickened perception was insufficient to enable him to analyze the phenomenon. He *knew* he was still in the same chair in the doctor's room. All the objects in that room were as clearly visible as they had been from the moment of his awakening. And yet he seemed to be not there, but on Broadway, and keenly alive to all that was occurring on that thoroughfare. And this sense of being in two places at the same time was sufficiently perplexing in itself to leave no unemployed section of his gray matter for the purpose of solving the other coincident problem. Indeed, any transient wonderment at the ability to see and hear things which were transpiring at a place where he knew he was not, was quickly swallowed up in a most absorbing interest in observing the things themselves.

For at this instant he appeared on the scene. Perhaps it would be more correct, in view of what shortly became apparent to his much perturbed mind, to say that "it" appeared on the scene. Singleton Worth recognized his extremely familiar self, clad in his customary habiliments. But at that point the recognition ceased. For there was an expression of absolute blankness upon the face of the individual that was now parading down Broadway that he indignantly repudiated as a correct simulacrum of his own business countenance.

"Great Scott!" (The doctor's words again flashed into his

head.) "That is my physical body without any brains attached. Now we *are* up against it!"

The hands of a jeweller's clock indicated the hour of eight-thirty. Worth made a rapid calculation. "Eight-thirty in the evening, and I came into this rascally doctor's house at about eleven-thirty in the morning." How many horrible things had happened since then? His soul sank in dread; but he was none the less able to escape the cognizance of the subsequent adventures of the external semblance of himself.

It walked at a leisurely gait down Broadway, occasionally bumping into pedestrians and mechanically apologizing by a bow and a polite lift of its hat. At street corners Worth's agony was augmented by the extraordinary narrowness of Its escapes from being run over. But It ploughed stodgily along and Worth began to hope again.

"Now, if the blamed thing doesn't meet anybody It knows," he reflected, "It may pull through. Maybe It's got sense enough to go home and go to bed."

This proved not to be the case, however, as Worth very shortly discovered. For his bodily alter ego, instead of turning to the right at Madison Square into Twenty-seventh Street and then west to Worth's bachelor apartment on that street, held steadily south into the Square, where It sat down on a bench and proceeded to light and dispose of a cigar.

By this time Worth had begun to realize that this physical self, whose peregrinations he was forced to observe, was following something very like a preconceived and logical course of action, being evidently guided by a sort of animal instinct from one place to another and from one experience to the next. It was like a blind horse that, having been driven for years over a milk route, would stop at the proper houses with no guidance from the driver, purely from the force of habit.

He strove to ascertain what the moving impulse could be, and presently decided that his other self was simply repeating his own movements of some previous evening. If this theory were correct, and second thought convinced him that it was entirely possible, then It would go on through the evening, blindly doing over again whatever things he had done on that former

night which It seemed to be re-living. But which of all of the evenings of the past could it be? Certainly an evening when he had smoked a cigar in Madison Square. Probably that of his last previous visit to that place. When was that? He cudgelled his memory. It came to him in an instant. Two weeks since. At least, two weeks prior to the unfortunate day when he foolishly entrusted his miserable self to the tender mercies of that Hindoo doctor. But whether that was this morning, or some day weeks ago, was beyond his present knowledge. At any rate he must strive to recall what happened on that night. Yes, he recollected that after dinner he had gone over to Madison Square to smoke a cigar just as that thing was doing now. But what next? Where did he go? Whom did he see?

Merciful Heavens! And Powers of Darkness! For at this moment the figure on the bench arose, threw away the end of Its unfinished cigar and, crossing the park to Fifth Avenue, walked with a rapid stride across Twenty-third Street, headed south, as his recollection pitilessly predicted, for Washington Square. If Worth had experienced agony during the walk down Broadway and through the dragging puffs of that interminable cigar, that had indeed been slight compared to the torture and dismay that now shook his very soul. The terrible shrinking suspicion grew every moment into an appalling certainty. He strove to disbelieve his memory,— to hope that even yet he might be mistaken. But it was all of no avail. Nothing could save him now. For the unescapable reminiscence would not be denied. On the evening he had last smoked a cigar in the park, he had called on Elizabeth Schermerhorn!

And Elizabeth, on that other evening, the first time he had seen her after her return from a five years' sojourn in Europe, had been exceedingly kind. Quite surprisingly so, in fact. So much so that Singleton Worth had begun to cherish dreams that possibly — The thought filled him with anguish. This had really been the bottom reason for his attempt at a reduction of his too evident figure. And now that thing! — that block! — that automaton! that fatal image of his own unfortunate self — was pressing relentlessly onward to become the instrument of his

undoing — the destroyer of his placid vision of future happiness! Was ever a more cruel fate thrust upon a helpless and innocent victim?

An automobile whizzed through a cross street as the figure of himself stepped from the curb. "Run over It — Smash It!" he shrieked in mental objurgation. But no such luck. With a sharp "honk" of the horn, a quick twist of the steering-wheel and a muttered oath from the chauffeur, the machine skidded to one side, missing the dream-like pedestrian by less than six inches.

A burly mendicant bumped into It. It tipped Its hat and strode on undisturbed. The tramp slouched after, skulking close to the house-line.

"Rob him! knock him on the head! throw him down a cellarway! He's got a good watch and plenty of money" implored the unhappy Worth. But as the foot-pad crept nearer to his intended victim a blue-coated, brass-buttoned minion of the law hove in sight, and the man took to his heels. The short remaining distance was speedily traversed and Worth, now in the lowest depths of soul-racking despondency, beheld his image mount the front steps of the Schermerhorn mansion on Waverly Place.

The footman took the card which the figure of a man with Its curiously accurate repetition of the events of the former evening had ready, and ushered It into the parlor. In an indescribably short space of time, or so at least it seemed to the frenzied Worth, Miss Schermerhorn entered the room, holding out both hands with her most charming smile. If she had seemed beautiful to Singleton Worth on the occasion of his previous visit, she was a thousand times more attractive to his distracted mental vision, clad as she now was in a bewitching gown of a gray, shimmery material that displayed her tall, graceful figure to its utmost advantage. The effigy on the sofa sat unmoved, the same vacuous expression on its countenance.

"Stand up and shake hands, for Heaven's sake," begged Worth from the depths of his tortured soul. "Even a wooden man would have sense enough to do that."

But the figure on the couch remained calmly seated while

the young woman moved forward, the inane expression on Its face unchanged, as she drew nearer.

"Why, Mr. Worth, what can be the matter with you, — are you ill?" exclaimed Miss Schermerhorn in mingled amazement and alarm. "Let me get you a glass of wine." She rang the bell, gave hurried directions, and the butler returned instantly with a decanter and some wine glasses. Hastily filling one, the girl handed it to the figure on the couch. Feeling the glass in Its hand, Worth's unfortunate image carried it to Its mouth and gulped the contents down with one swallow, and without the slightest change of expression.

"Do you feel better now?" queried his hostess anxiously. Still no reply — but the creature sat there with the same inane countenance, holding the empty wine-glass in Its hand. In desperation, the young woman filled the glass once more from the decanter. And once more, with automaton-like precision, it was emptied in the twinkling of an eye, still with no apparent restoration of any symptoms of mentality. Miss Schermerhorn looked sharply at the figure of a man before her. The expression of solicitude passed suddenly from her face. A suspicion had been aroused which developed rapidly into certainty. Worth, now in the very abandonment of despair, saw her countenance take on first a hot flush of anger, which was rapidly followed by a look of utter and intense disgust. She rang the bell sharply. The footman appeared.

"Wilkins," said Miss Schermerhorn icily, "Mr. Worth will be glad if you will assist him to the outer door. You need not trouble yourself to go farther with him. And Wilkins," she added, as the man bowed in silence while his mistress retreated to a door leading into an adjoining room, "I am not at home hereafter when Mr. Worth calls."

The footman stood in the outer vestibule a moment watching the retreating figure. There seemed no necessity for calling a cab, as he had first intended doing. Whatever might be the mental condition of the departing visitor, there was no physical inability apparent, at least as far as the power of locomotion was concerned. For no hesitation nor uncertainty was displayed in the manner in which Worth's counterfeit present-

ment descended the long flight of steps. At the bottom It halted for a moment, drew a cigar from Its pocket and lighted it in a perfectly natural way. The footman shook his head, mystified beyond comprehension, turned, and went back into the house, closing the door softly behind him.

Worth glanced again around the room in which his spirit was imprisoned, in an attempt to escape further knowledge of these disgraceful happenings. There was still no change in any respect. The pipe still lay on the table within reach of his hand, which still rested on the arm of the chair. All the other objects in the room were as plainly discernible as ever. And he was still utterly unable to perform the slightest physical function which his mind directed and desired, as renewed efforts in that direction speedily assured him. He had passed, however, from anxiety and distress concerning the adventures of his physical self to profound indifference. He cared little what became of that useless body. It had successfully accomplished the destruction of his fondest hopes and now it might proceed on Its fated career to any wretched end. Nothing could matter.

All these thoughts passed through the wretched broker's mind in the slight period of time consumed in the lighting of the cigar. But he noticed now that something had happened to his walking delegate. For the first time it displayed symptoms of uncertainty. It seemed not to know what to do next nor where to go. And Its appearance had remarkably changed. The characteristic ruddy, almost apoplectic complexion had been succeeded in an instant by a pallor that was almost sickly in its aspect. The double chin had nearly vanished, the corpulent waist line had shrunk a full third, and Its clothes hung loosely on Its diminished frame. There was a distressed, haunted look on Its face which was pitiful to see as It stood on the curb in front of the house, looking first in one direction and then in another like a hunted animal.

"Serves you jolly well right," reflected Worth with a kind of bitter joy. "You ought to get thin. You've done enough to make a fat man into a ghost in twenty-four hours."

And then he realized what the trouble really was. The

schedule had been interrupted by the events which had taken place at Miss Schermerhorn's house. Certainly *he* had not been summarily ejected on the occasion of his last visit. Quite the contrary, he remembered only too well, with a deep sense of his loss. And there being no further possibility of proceeding exactly to repeat all the experiences of that prior evening, the creature was helpless.

Just then It crossed the street with a hesitating step, and, going into Washington Square, sat down on one of the benches. Worth's fears returned in greater numbers. For it at once occurred to him that the thing had gone back in the schedule to Its last performance before calling on Miss Schermerhorn. If that were true it would take up the thread at that point and go woodenly ahead once more in Its attempts to repeat the subsequent acts. As soon as It had finished that cigar, It would probably return to her house and attempt to make another call. The idea was maddening. The figure smoked stolidly on. The cigar was nearly finished, — a few more puffs and It would rise and throw it away, and then — But the mental strain had been too great, and consciousness departed.

He was roused by a voice which at first he did not recognize. But as he strove to recover his senses, the soft tones of the speaker took on some measure of familiarity, and he seemed to hear, while still in a half-wakened dreamy state, these words:

"There can be absolutely no doubt that extraordinary physical changes in the human body are sometimes produced by and are directly traceable as the effects of severe mental strain or suffering. These phenomena are so universally acknowledged and accredited as to be no longer disputable. You will therefore readily perceive, gentlemen, that as in the excellent demonstration of my system which you have recently witnessed, — " But here the voice, which had been growing fainter and fainter, faded away entirely, and Worth's next conscious impression was that some one was bathing his temples with a wet sponge, and that there was an exceedingly pungent odor in his nostrils. He sat up in the chair with an effort. And then he realized that he was still in the same place and became aware that there was a fresh cup of coffee on the table by his side. He drank it

greedily. Dr. Abkandah, from the other side of the table, spoke with his customary softness:

"You will find it wiser, Mr. Worth, to go into the country for a few days that you may become accustomed to your changed physical condition before resuming the regular routine of your life. You will observe that I have provided you with appropriate garments, as those which you wore when you came here would now hardly be becoming."

Worth started to his feet and sprang to a mirror. He was indeed differently clad, in a new, well-fitting suit of gray. He gazed at first with alarmed surprise, but afterward with complacent satisfaction, at his changed appearance. He had evidently lost about fifty pounds in weight. His face, a trifle pale, looked ten years younger, although his hair was slightly tinged with gray at the temples.

"The hair will resume its natural color in a day or two, Mr. Worth," said the doctor. "And the country air will quite restore your normal complexion. And now, as I am extremely busy, may I ask you to allow me to show you to the carriage which is waiting. You will find your railway ticket and full directions for your journey in your inside pocket; also that all necessary arrangements have been made for your entertainment at your destination. You are provided with sufficient funds. My charges, as you will recall, were paid in advance, and were inclusive of these minor details. I trust you will live long to enjoy your improved physical condition." He rose and led the way to the door.

"But, Doctor," expostulated the bewildered broker, a thousand anxious questions rushing to his lips.

"Not a word now, Mr. Worth," replied the doctor firmly. "This is my invariable rule. On your return I shall cheerfully answer any inquiries you may choose to make."

And Worth was hurried down into a carriage which whirled him rapidly to the depot en route for his country visit.

After a pleasant stay of ten days in an obscure village in southern Pennsylvania, Worth found himself back again in the city and drove directly to Dr. Abkandah's house. It was vacant, with a "To Let" sign hanging out. He went then to his

apartment, letting himself in with his latch-key, his valet being away. There was a pile of letters on his table and one on top was sealed with an Oriental seal. Worth tore it open eagerly, and read the following brief message:

> DEAR MR. WORTH: I am unexpectedly recalled to India. I leave you my benediction. Remember one thing always. There are sometimes things which happen in a man's life that can never be explained. And those things are far better forgotten. ABKANDAH.

. . . . . .

"Do you know, Singleton," said his wife, as they lolled back blissfully in their steamer chairs on their honeymoon trip abroad, reveling in the wondrous beauty of sky and sea, "I had the queerest experience one evening about three months ago. It was when you were away in the country taking that wonderful cure that fairly made a new man of you. I have often thought I'd like to tell you about it, and yet it was so strange and incomprehensible that sometimes I almost believe I dreamed it, though it seemed terribly real at the time. But something has always prevented me from telling you about it. Do you think I ought to?"

"My dearest Elizabeth," said Worth, taking her hand surreptitiously under cover of the rug, "was it disagreeable?"

"Excessively so," rejoined Mrs. Worth emphatically.

"But after all did it turn out all right in the end?"

She gazed at him fondly: "Yes, it turned out gloriously."

"Well, then, my darling," said Worth easily, "if it turned out all right, what's the use of hanging on to a disagreeable memory, or bringing the slightest cloud on the perfect happiness of our blissful existence. The best thing to do about that experience is just to forget it."

"I believe you are right, Singleton," she replied, returning the pressure of his fingers with a little squeeze. "At any rate it certainly wouldn't do any good to tell you."

And she never did.

The Insuring of Mrs. Harrigan.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

IT was Fenwick's first trip in the employ of the Gotham and Glory Life Assurance Company. He had talked much, but business had not come his way. It requires an exceptionally good talker to interest a farmer in life assurance. Fenwick had just begun to realize this when he chanced to meet Maloney.

"It's no use wastin' yer breath on me," said that individual, "but I'll put you wise to some sure business."

Within Fenwick's breast Hope flared up and made him gasp. "Where?" he cried.

"Turn up by the lake and walk along by the pine woods till you strike Harrigan's place. Harrigan takes out a policy with every insurance man that comes his way."

Fenwick shut his bag with a snap and hurried up the long, hot and dusty road.

Harrigan was sitting before his open door when the insurance agent approached. The farmer was a thin, consumptive-looking man, with the weary look of the confirmed pessimist. Fenwick summed him up as an easy victim, and with much confidence he unloosed his opening speech.

Harrigan listened patiently. "Is it the biggest and best company in the world?" he asked languidly.

"Certainly," cried Fenwick. "We have five hundred and eleven millions in reserve. We paid out ninety-seven millions in claims last year. No humbugging with our society, sir. No trouble for the unfortunate widows and orphans." He unlocked his bag and pulled out a mass of insurance literature. "And the rates, Mr. Harrigan! Now, what will be your age at your next birthday?"

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The farmer whittled a piece of pine and contemplated the little pile of chips.

"It wasn't myself I was thinking of," he said, dreamily.

"Wife, sir?" queried Fenwick briskly, sorting out his forms with nervous fingers. "What age is she, sir?"

Harrigan stood up and turned towards the door of the shack. "Come inside and we'll talk it over," he said.

The agent was jubilant. His fat face glowed with delight. His heart throbbed mightily as visions of a fat commission floated before his mind.

Harrigan motioned him to a broken-backed chair near the fireplace, while he perched himself on a stool between his visitor and the door. The farmer seemed to be pondering over some problem, and Fenwick, seeing that he was not listening to the remarks about the benefits of life assurance, stopped talking and waited for him to speak.

After a few minutes' silence, Harrigan drew his stool closer and leaned forward.

"Wish you had turned up last week," he murmured.

"Better late than never," said Fenwick cheerily. "I'm in time if your good lady is—"

"That's just it," interrupted Harrigan moodily, "*she's dead.*"

The agent's backbone seemed to lose its stiffening force, and his body sagged. The information startled him.

"I—I thought you wanted to insure her," he stammered.

"So I do," said Harrigan quietly.

Fenwick tried to smile, but fear smoothed out the wrinkles that mirth tried to create, and left his face white and ghastly. He thought of the two miles of dusty road that separated Harrigan from his nearest neighbor, and the mournful sobbing of the pines tautened his nerves.

"But—but you cannot insure her," he spluttered; "it's impossible."

Harrigan reached forward and tapped him hard with a bony forefinger. "No one knows she's dead," he whispered.

The agent's throat became suddenly parched, and he breathed painfully. The weird song of the pines increased in volume.

Again the farmer leaned forward and tapped him impressively.

A toil-battered hand pointed to a long box beneath the stretcher, and Fenwick shivered.

"She's in that," he murmured; "and I want you to insure her for a thousand dollars. Wait a moment and I'll show her to you."

The limp and perspiring agent glanced towards the door, but Harrigan read his thoughts. He reached forward and grasped Fenwick by the collar, and then, stooping down, kicked the lid off the long box. A figure wrapped in canvas lay inside it.

"Good Lord!" shrieked the insurance man. "Wha — what happened to her?"

"I fixed her with this axe," said Harrigan calmly. "She has been talking too much of late, an' I got tired of her tongue."

The agent showed symptoms of apoplexy. The chair creaked as his spineless body sank against the broken back.

"Come on, wake up," cried Harrigan irritably. "Get out your forms and your pen and ink, and we'll insure her. I'll give you two hundred dollars out of the deal when I get their check."

He let the head of the axe fall noisily upon the floor, and the agent came to life again.

"Yes, sir; oh, yes, sir, I will," he stammered. "Five thousand dollar policy? Yes, sir, certainly."

Harrigan juggled playfully with the axe, and the fountain pen travelled at full speed across the printed forms.

"Wha — what name, sir?" gasped Fenwick. "What is — er — what was the lady's name?"

"Mary Ann Harrigan, maiden name O'Brien," answered the farmer.

"Ah, yes. Ann Harrigan Mary, maiden name O'Ryan," mumbled the nervous agent. "Wha — what age will she be next birthday?"

Harrigan looked puzzled. He balanced the axe in his hand and contemplated the ceiling.

"Guess she won't have one," he said, slowly.

Fenwick stopped writing. "We must put in what age she — she will be next b — b — birthday," he gurgled.

"Very good," said Harrigan, "I'll see what age she was last birthday. It's entered in this 'History of the Revolution.'"

He moved across the room to consult the worn volume that lay

upon the mantel-shelf, and the agent saw an opportunity to escape. With a bound he cleared the stool that blocked his path to the door, dashed down the green patch before the house and, springing over the low stone wall, fled at top speed, leaving proposal forms, fountain pen, and handgrip on Harrigan's table. A shout came down the wind, and a stone whizzed past him, and his short legs ate up the dusty road at a terrific gait.

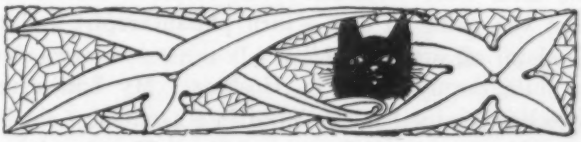
An hour afterwards, Fenwick, with clothes all torn and splashed, breathlessly related the story of the murder of Mrs. Harrigan to the policeman in the nearest town, and when he had finished the officer propped himself against the saloon and laughed till the tears raced down his cheeks.

"Have ye run all the way?" asked the Law.

Fenwick snapped out an affirmative. The other's mirth annoyed him.

"Well, that's a durned shame," grinned the officer. "You're a fat man and you may be troubled with heart disease. I'll have to be speaking to Harrigan, or he'll be killing one of you fellers yet. You're the sixth insurance man that he has played the trick on this last month. That's a dummy stuffed with wool that he has in the box. He never had a wife, to my knowledge, and I've been round here this twenty years."

And again the Law propped itself against the saloon to ease the merriment bubbling within, while the representative of the Gotham and Glory Life Assurance Company hurried down the street.



A Light in the Desert.*

BY CLIFFORD HOWARD.

WITH deep sighs of relief the two men slid from their horses at the edge of the well. Already the shadows of the giant Panamints had cast the shroud of night upon the stygial sands of Death Valley. Only the topmost peaks, ten thousand feet above, still saw the day, and their roseate pinnacles, incarnate valedictions of the descending sun, glimmered in the infinite altitude as torturing lights of heaven upon the brink of Hades.

Before the last glow had faded into the blackness, the two men had made their camp, a sparking fire of tule and mesquite was ablaze upon the edge of the oasis, the wearied horses were grazing eagerly upon the rank bunch grass, and their owners, recumbent upon the ground, were munching in hungry silence.

"I tell you what it is, Hoskins," remarked one of them at last, as he cut himself a slice of the canned beef, "this working for Uncle Sam and the glory of science is all right enough as poetry, but painfully unsatisfying to a man's independence. I have had just about all I want of it — shut up in a moldy office half the year and hid from the face of man the other six months, freezing in the mountains or burning the life out of your throat in the desert. I'm going to quit."

"Fine talk, Doc," commented the other — "noble ambition. What are you going to do? — turn philanthropist and take old Bailey's claim off his hands?"

"No philanthropy about it, Hoskins. My hunch regarding that old fellow's mine has developed into a gilt-edge cinch. I got a letter at Daggett from the assay office. The samples of ore I

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took out of a little drift of my own making average over sixty dollars! Bailey missed the ledge entirely and has been going farther from it at every pick. Thought I'd keep this to myself, but you're entitled to know it, Hoskins, as a safety valve to my exuberant joy."

"Bully for you, Doc!" congratulated Hoskins. "What did you say was the price of your option on the claim?"

"Nine hundred and fifty — good until next Thursday, the tenth. We ought to get into Rhyolite by Tuesday; and then, with a sheet of paper and a decent pen, I'll bid farewell to your Uncle Samuel and embark upon the sea of manly independence. No philanthropy or charity about this, my dear fellow; nothing but pure, natural, human selfishness. If there could exist such a specimen as a sane altruist, and I happened to be that one, I suppose I would go to old Bailey and show the gambling whiskey-drinker that he's got good values in his mine and refuse to allow him to sacrifice it to me, notwithstanding that he thinks he's sticking me now for two hundred per cent. more than it will ever be worth. But as I'm only an ordinary mortal and am not losing my wits, I'm going to do business along natural and conventional lines. We're all selfish at heart — every one of us. All business is selfish — all charity is selfish — indirectly, perhaps, but selfish at bottom, all the same. I am blunt enough to admit it regarding myself, and that's the only real difference between me and some others.

"'However good a man may be,
Or noble, brave or kind;
However great his charity
Or sacrifice designed,
He acts for self and self alone,
And not for man or friend:
To pleasure gain or pain disown
Is but his selfish end.'

"I don't know who wrote the rhyme, but it sums up my philosophy to a finish."

"Mine, too," acquiesced Hoskins, preparing to light a cigarette. "But don't you know, Bradley," he continued, after a meditative puff or two, "I can't help questioning sometimes whether there is not something in us, beyond and apart from our 'self' instinct, which on occasion prompts us to sacrifice ourselves for others,

without our knowing why we do it and without a thought or a possibility of any personal consideration; an expression, as it were, of that higher, impersonal charity which the moralists assert must be conceded in order to account for the cohesion of society and the drift toward universal brotherhood."

"You're too metaphysical for me, Hoskins. I am not ready to admit any such duality of motive. So far as I am concerned, I am of the earth, earthy, and I can't conceive of my doing anything for another, whatever it may cost me by way of sacrifice or pain, which is not in its final analysis reducible to pure, personal selfishness."

"That's all right, Doc. I'm more than seven-eighths ready to agree with you. But, all the same, it sticks in my mental craw that each of us — and you're no exception to the rule — holds somewhere in reserve a modicum of this higher charity; a something which is capable, when the opportunity offers, of rising above the personal or the self and performing an act of pure unselfishness."

The young Doctor of Science shrugged his shoulders and smiled indulgently. "You ought to have been a theologian," he commented. — "Hello! what's that?"

A sudden cough had sounded out of the darkness. The two men turned, and by the glow of the fire beheld a human form crouching in the grass.

"Hi, there, brother! Who are you, and what do you want?" demanded Hoskins with blunt amiability and a prompt precautionary hold upon his gun.

The man straightened up and advanced slowly toward them. By his ragged clothes, his unkempt hair and beard, and by the furtive, half-malignant expression of his eyes, they classified him at once as a prisoner of the desert; one of earth's castaways, the moral stragglers who wander into the valley of death, lured by the silence, the desolation, the loneliness, wherein to hide from their crimes among men. The two explorers had seen his kind before. It was not uncommon to find them, one at a time, lurking about their camp, morose, suspicious, uncommunicative, yet drawn to the presence of their fellow-kind through some impelling instinct.

It was something of a surprise, therefore, when the man before them not only approached but spoke to them of his own accord: "You'll pardon me, strangers," he said, speaking with nervous quickness, "but I'm banking on it that you're square and ain't going to refuse to give me a helpin' hand. You're the first white men I've spoke to for goin' on two years. Why I ain't clean locoed, only the Lord Almighty can tell you. I've got a wife and a thousand dollars waitin' for me on the outside; but I daren't go; I daren't get away. Somebody's got to go for me, and I take it you fellows ain't goin' to refuse me. I got a hunch you'll give me a fair deal."

He had rattled on in a breathless sort of haste. He stopped now and eyed the two men curiously.

"Sit down and have a bite of something with us," invited Bradley.

"Thanks," returned the stranger. "It looks almighty good alongside o' Indian fodder." He sat down and ate two or three eager mouthfuls. Then he desisted, and went on with his talk: "You've heard of the Garcia case — Alfonso Garcia, the big rancher down at San Bernardino, who got into Death Valley here, some four years ago, and ain't been heard from since? Some said he was murdered and some thought he just naturally died of the desert, like many a poorer devil. Anyhow, there's a standing reward of a thousand dollars, put up by his wife, for the man who can furnish the proof of what's become of him. And that thousand dollars is mine. D'ye hear me? It's mine! I've found his body — his bones; and day and night for sixteen months, mind you, I've watched 'em and guarded 'em. If any other man had so much as laid his eyes on 'em, I'd 'a' killed him! They're mine — I found 'em — and that thousand dollars goes to me! It's mine! There ain't no man can hold it back from me. I'm goin' to get it, if I have to live another sixteen months in Hell waitin' for it. I'm goin' back to my wife and my folks clean-handed. I swiped my pardner's grub stake — five hundred dollars; I ain't denyin' it to you. I didn't set out to do it, but I done it; but there ain't any man ever dare throw it at me. He'll have his five hundred when he or anybody else sees me again. All I want is a fresh start, and, by Heaven, I'm goin' to have it! I'm not sayin'

it ain't right what's come to me for what I've done. I've took my medicine; and I don't need to tell you men what that means — a-livin' down here in the valley o' death; but when you've got a wife on the outside, and a kid, and it's only them that keeps you stickin' to the game instead o' layin' down your hand to the buzzards, you can figure it out for yourself what it does to a man's peace o' mind, to set out here in the desert and watch the sun come up and go down day after day and month after month, with a thousand dollars starin' you in the face each day and your wife a-callin' to you in your dreams at night. There's men that have gone clean crazy and laid down and died after lookin' at the water mirage out there on the sands for a couple of hours. And here's me, a-burnin' in Hades for sixteen months — sixteen ages — and Heaven standin' wide open before me!"

He stopped and fixed his haggard eyes upon his two auditors with a look shading uncannily from intense fierceness to one of appealing despair.

"Why haven't you gone and claimed the reward?" asked Hoskins, after the man had swallowed another mouthful. "Why have you waited all this time?"

"*Why!*" retorted the man fiercely. "Do you suppose I'd leave those bones layin' there for somebody else, maybe, to come along and find while I was gone? And what show would I have if Garcia's folks was minded to turn me down? And ain't I said to you why I'm out here? Do you think I'm a fool, to go back before I've got the cash in my pocket to make good?"

"I see," returned Hoskins; "and I guess you are right about it. You want some one to notify Garcia's people and testify to it that you're entitled to the reward. Well, I guess there won't be any trouble about our doing that much for you."

"That's all I'm askin' of you, my friend; and I don't ask you to move a hand till you're satisfied that I'm tellin' the truth to you. Here's Garcia's bunch o' keys. His name and address is on the tag. I guess maybe you can't see it by this light — but it's there."

He passed the ring with the keys over to Hoskins, who scrutinized the lettering on the aluminum tag, holding it up so as to permit the glow of the fire to illumine it. "Yes, I can make it out," he said — "'Alfonso Garcia, San Bernardino, California.'"

"I found 'em in the sand, close by where his body was burned and buried," continued the man; "and this handkerchief, too, with his initials in the corner."

"Must have been murdered and robbed," commented Bradley.

"'Taint for me to say," answered the stranger, carefully replacing the keys and the handkerchief in his pocket. "But you can satisfy yourself as to that, maybe, by diggin' up his bones; and that's what I'm askin' you to do. I ain't ever touched 'em yet" (and he instinctively crossed himself), "and there ain't any other man goin' to touch 'em without I say so. If you're goin' to give me a fair deal — and I have it here" (pointing to his breast) "that you men are white and mean to stand by me — why, it's no more'n right that you should see his body with your own eyes, so you can swear to Garcia's folks that it's the truth I'm tellin' you. Let 'em have it that you are witness and will take oath to it, that the thousand dollars belongs to me. It's mine — and you're goin' to see that it's handed over to me. There ain't no man or no law can hold it back from me! I can wait another week or another month, maybe, till you can get his people to come out here with you for the remains and bring me my money. I ain't askin' charity of you. Half of the cash is yours, if you'll have it. All I want is the five hundred, to clear my name and give me another chance. Is it a go, friends?"

"Sure thing," responded Hoskins. "We'll do what we can for you, old man, and we're not asking any pay for it, either, outside of actual expenses, perhaps. Come around in the morning, early — we must be moving before sun-up — and we'll have a look at Garcia's grave and his remains. My friend, Doc Bradley, here, is an expert on skeletons. Give him a couple of ribs and a jaw of some old dead-and-gone Methuselah, and he'll tell you more about his personal appearance, and his habits and his ancestors, than the old fellow ever knew himself."

A smile of relief, of actual joy, lighted up the man's face as he rose. "Thanks, friends. I knowed you'd make good. I'll sleep happy tonight, and when she calls me I can tell her at last that I'm comin' — comin' home. It's 'Adios' to you, then, till the morning"; and with crouching body and soft, furtive step he slipped away and was swallowed up in the black desert night.

. . . . . .

In the twilight of the dawn two men followed laboriously in the wake of another as he pushed forward with intense nervous haste through the dry, yielding sand. Suddenly he stopped and pointed to a clump of mesquite. Close by it was a slight hollow in the ground, covered over with dried twigs and grass. As the two men joined him he knelt down and carefully removed the coverings. Beneath them, in the center of the depression, lay a small mound, with bits of charred wood and cloth lying about it and upon it; and protruding in ghastly bareness from one side of it was the upper portion of the tibia of a human limb.

The man rose slowly and pointed to the grave. "There," he said with unaffected solemnity, "is the body, the remains, of Alfonso Garcia."

The realization that they had been made the confidants of this lone man's secret, the secret that he had guarded for all these torturing months of loneliness and despairing hope, the secret in which was bound up all there was to him of life, would have touched the hearts of men far more hardened than were these two who now stood by in ready sympathy and willingness to help.

"See for yourself," continued the man. "I can't touch 'em; I daren't! But it's no more'n right that they be dug up, now that I got witnesses and so you can satisfy yourself that you ain't sendin' Garcia's folks up here on some fool errand."

Bradley nodded his head in approval, and without further comment got down on his knees and began a careful excavation with his hands, deftly scooping out the sand and pieces of charcoal that filled the loosely made grave. The bones lay near the surface. One or two of them he lifted out, then carefully replaced. Others he did not disturb, but examined them where they lay. He did not undertake to uncover the entire skeleton. He had soon seen enough to satisfy him, and after the other two had likewise been satisfied with a sight of these gruesome fragments of mortal being, he threw back the sand and hid them again from view.

"He's there all right," remarked the man, a look of satisfaction glowing in his eyes.

"Yes, I guess there's no doubt about your having a good case," responded Hoskins, "and we'll undertake to see that you get

whatever you're entitled to. You're quite sure about the offer of the reward, are you?"

"Saw it with my own eyes," answered the man — "a standing reward of a thousand dollars to any one who'd furnish information as to the death or the whereabouts of the body of Alfonso Garcia. Not likely anybody's got it yet, is there, with Garcia still a-layin' there in the sand?" and the man's eyes gleamed with a new joy. Already the spirit of his freedom and his resurrection was upon him.

Bradley had been looking at him with intense earnestness. "See here, my friend," he said, "I have a proposition to make to you: You have waited long enough for your reward. There is no telling how much longer you may have to wait if you are going to stay here until Garcia's heirs, and the law, and his widow, and who knows what else besides, may have to be consulted and satisfied. Turn your claim over to me. I'll give you a thousand dollars for it. You're in no position to enforce your rights if there should be any hitch about the matter. It's different with me. I am free to fight, and I can afford to wait. You can't." He took a heavy canvas envelope from the inside pocket of his coat, and taking from it a small package of bills deliberately counted out ten of them. "There," he said, "is your thousand dollars; and Garcia's bones there and that bunch of keys and the handkerchief are mine. Is it a bargain?"

As one in his sleep, dazed and confused, the man automatically drew out from his pocket the two tokens of identification and stretched forth a trembling, uncertain hand toward the packet of bills. Then, when he felt the money within his clasp, he pressed it with sudden vehemence to his breast and sank to the ground, sobbing with hysterical joy.

Bradley dropped the keys and handkerchief into his pocket and slowly replaced the remaining two notes in the envelope. "Come on," he said, turning to Hoskins, "we must go. We'll leave you a sack of grub and a flask over at the well," he continued, addressing the man who still sat upon the ground, gazing now as an enraptured child upon the wealth clutched within his hands.

"God bless you, friend," he said, suddenly looking up and extending his hand. "God bless you!"

"Good-bye and good luck to you," returned Bradley, and taking Hoskins by the arm strode off abruptly toward the camp.

Neither man spoke a word until they were mounted and had started on their day's journey. "Of course, this is your affair, Doc," remarked Hoskins without introduction, "but it strikes me you are taking almighty big chances. You only have that fellow's word for it that there's a reward for this Garcia's body, and it's all up with your cash and the buying of old Bailey's claim if he's been giving you a fake story."

"He's got the story straight," answered Bradley. "I happen to have heard of this Garcia case, and I know that the offer of the reward is a bona fide one."

"Well, but even so, what are you going to do about your option? It expires Thursday, and you can't by any possibility get over to San Bernardino and get Garcia's people out here to prove your title to the thousand by that time."

"No, and I don't intend to try," said Bradley; and as he spoke he raised his eyes to one of the far-distant Funeral peaks, towering in sunlit radiance as a torch above the valley, a beacon herald of the coming day. "I'm going to tell you something, Hoskins," he went on, speaking quietly and keeping his gaze fixed upon the illumined mount, "and after that we'll consider the subject closed. That poor fellow back there is mistaken. The grave that he has been watching over is the grave of an Indian. The bones are those of a woman — some old Digger squaw. . . . Tell me, Hoskins, have you ever seen a more glorious sunrise?"

A Millionaire's Momentous Transaction.*

BY FRED S. BROWN.

IF you can do that, I will make you rich, and, in my estimation, you will become famous." And the speaker was worth $50,000,000.

"I can do it as sure as you are on this ship," was the reply. And this speaker was worth $60.

"There is nothing more certain than that I am on this ship, I am sorry to say. I would give $10,000,000 if I were not.

"There are worse places to be in than on a ship as well found as this one is, even if she hasn't any propeller or other motive power."

"True, but, in my estimation, being out here helpless on the ocean, entirely cut off from communication with interests whose vastness you cannot conceive, is absolutely indescribable torture. It is not dollars and cents alone that is involved. If it were merely money I could stand the strain a thousand times easier."

The liner whose decks the two men who thus conversed were pacing was thirty days overdue. While she was given up for lost by nearly everybody in the several countries interested in her fate, the actual facts were that she had only dropped her propeller and performed the unusual feat of drifting for almost a month without being sighted.

Among the passengers of the crippled liner were a score of men who in the financial world ranked as millionaires, and they were a hundred times as fretful as those of moderate means who were in the same boat.

The enforced idleness made life intolerable to the financiers, and if anybody could have set them ashore in a civilized community, he could have collected about a billion dollars — provided the men of money made good the offers they voiced.

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But the man most anxious to escape from the lolling liner was Mr. Jacob J. Robinson, the impatient individual who declared that he would give $10,000,000 to safely terminate the exasperating voyage.

He said so much about a vastly important transaction in which he was vitally interested that everybody on board the ship at last became so imbued with anxiety as to its outcome that that anxiety amounted to a positive relief to them, because it kept all hands from brooding over their own troubles.

The transaction harped on by the financier had been in negotiation before he had started on a hurried business trip abroad, and, according to his assertion, he had received cable advices as to its progress up to the hour when he set out to return home, but, of course, what had happened in the month he was at sea was a mystery to him.

So he pranced to and fro, daily, looking for a vessel which might be "hired or bought," as he put it, in order that he might be transported to a point where he could gain the keenly coveted information.

Other millionaires on the helpless ship had big transactions pending, but, in comparison with the Robinson affair they shrank into the dimensions of bucket shop deals, as the indications were that it was something that would, or maybe had, turned the financial world wrong end first, or had whirled the governments of several big nations into such a tangle that chaos reigned, or at least a general war was already being waged.

The impatient millionaire gave no details, but always talked in glittering generalities, and no one had the temerity to ask for specific information on such a momentous subject. The other millionaires discussed the question among themselves, and indulged in all kinds of surmises — at many of which they shivered — but the mystery remained impenetrable. Yet, none could doubt that the "transaction" was something awful, and the sympathy awakened at length attained such a depth that a blind pool of fabulous proportions was made up by the money kings to be offered in case it should be needed — provided, always, rescue came.

Mr. Robinson was so sincere and yet so mild-mannered in all he said that his assertions were convincing to the minds of all.

Even Jack Allbright, the least anxious passenger, who admitted that he was glad he didn't have to pay his board on the prolonged voyage, was convinced that the financier was not crazy.

Jack was about thirty-five years old and was having the time of his life. He didn't care how long the trip lasted. He treated the millionaires as more or less of a joke, or as he might a lot of college chums, paying them no more deference than he would have accorded fellow-members of a club, yet conducting himself toward everybody with independent respect.

Allbright contributed largely to the entertainment of the passengers by devising games and amusements to rob the horrible situation of its frightful tedium. He was popular with the whole ship's company.

One of Jack's diversions was a called meeting of the passengers at which the millionaires were to confess the most reprehensible acts of their lives. Robinson said that the worst thing he ever did, in his estimation, was to devote so much of his time to the accumulation of enormous wealth, that he felt that he stood convicted of selfishness. He had been so engrossed in money-making that he had not even taken the time to get married until within the last year, and then he was sixty years old. Now he was in a situation where all the money on earth could do him no good.

. . . . . .

When the now frantic proprietor of the overwhelming "transaction" said he was willing to give $10,000,000 to stand on solid land, Jack Allbright replied:

"I have a proposition to make, if it would be any relief to you to send a cablegram to your people."

"What! We have no wireless outfit!"

"I understand navigation," went on Jack, "and I have kept myself informed as to the position of this ship ever since she placidly shed her tail-feathers. I know that we are now within eighty miles of a small island on which the new ocean cable which is now being laid is landed by this time. The idea is, you know, to make the island of which I speak a relay station so as to avoid a stretch of 4,000 miles without a break. I am sure that the cable has reached that island since we sailed on this old hooker. No-

body on board has thought of it, if he knows anything about the subject, and, for reasons of my own, I don't intend to remind any one but you of the fact. I can reach that island, and send a cablegram to any part of the globe."

"If you can do that, I will make you rich, and you will, in my estimation, become famous," the financier repeated. "How can you get to the island?"

"You have apparently forgotten that you have a motor boat on this ship. We can get permission to have your boat put overboard, and I can make the island in four hours. I can steer straight to it by compass."

"If you can, you can help me to make a lot of money," said the victim of the wealth-getting habit. "I will tell you, confidentially, that I have a heavy financial interest in a chain of insurance companies in London. I can send the officials a cipher cablegram telling them to write risks on this ship, its cargo, and the life of every mother's son of us. Doubtless we have been posted as 'lost,' and the public will stampede to get such insurance. The chances are we will be picked up, some day, and the premiums will be enormous in the aggregate. The proposition is not in the nature of a swindle, for there is a chance that we may be lost after all. But that is not the transaction I have in mind. That is something which, in my opinion, overshadows the insurance proposition to such a vast extent that the insurance scheme is, comparatively speaking, inconceivably trivial — insignificant."

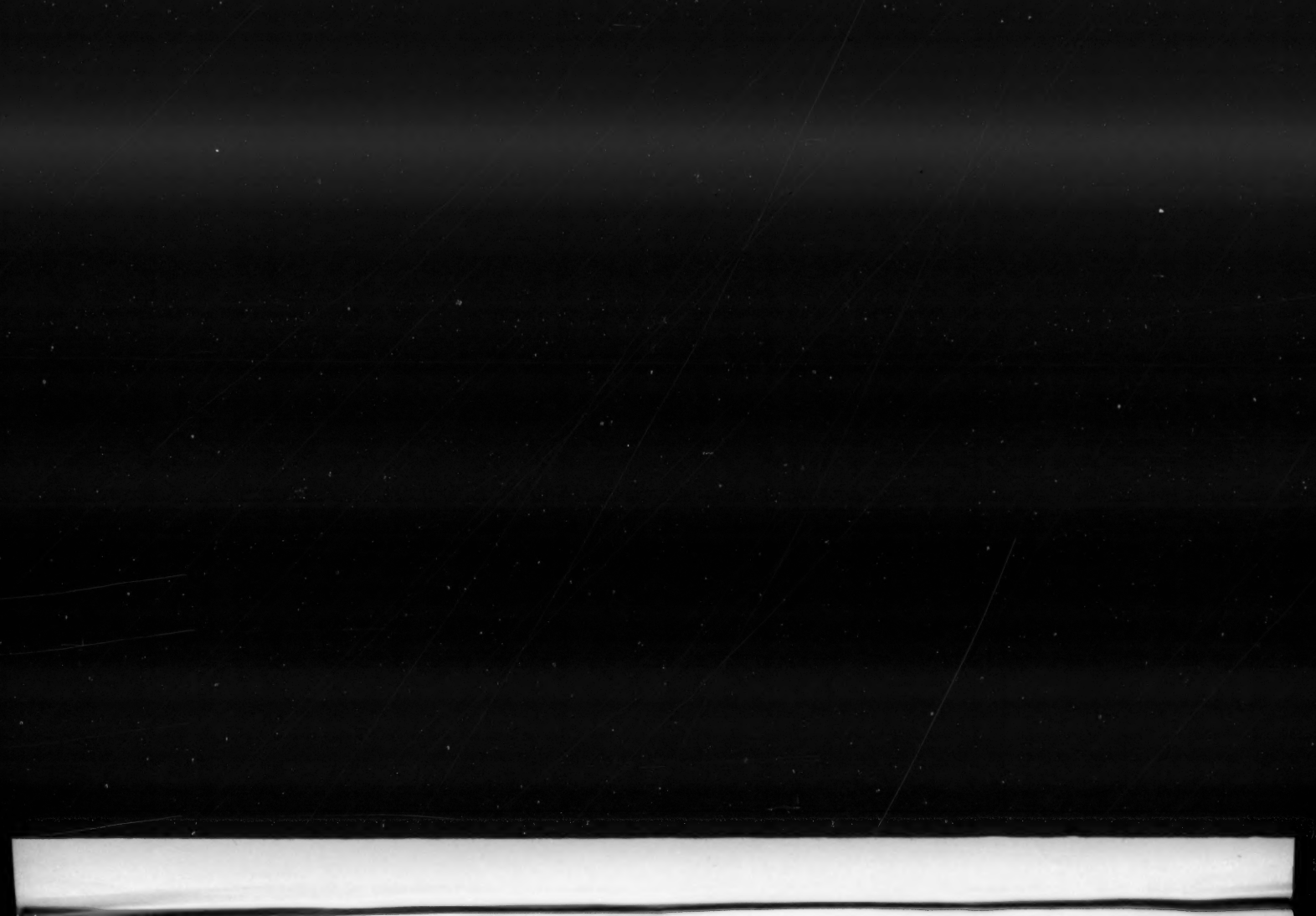
"Golly sakes alive!" exclaimed Jack.

"In my estimation the destruction of the world would be a slight affair in comparison with the transaction I have in mind. But didn't you tell me that you were a newspaper man?"

"I did."

"Doesn't your newspaper instinct prompt you to make a big fee by sending a report of the fate of this ship, describing existing conditions thereon, to the leading journals of the world?"

"I have a better scheme than that. I was once discharged by a managing editor for something I didn't do. It was about the only time in my varied career that I was not guilty as charged, and the nasty treatment I received nettled me. Besides that, the person who fired me is about the cheapest of my acquaintance that



draws a big salary which he doesn't earn. Now, here is my plan: After I have worked off your cablegrams and given them a few days to soak and bear fruit, I will cable the owner of the paper employing my enemy. I will say to that owner that I can furnish his paper with a cracking good, exclusive account of the fate of this vessel, and that I will not send a single word until he forwards proof that he has publicly discharged that pinhead managing editor with a guarantee that he will never be re-employed. My enemy will either be fired or there will be a riot — mayhap a lynching. At any rate, I will get more satisfaction out of the affair than I could out of all the money I ever saw."

So it was arranged that Jack was to have the motor boat set afloat for the ostensible purpose of scouting in search of a sail.

Mr. Robinson carefully wrote his dispatch relative to the grand "transaction" and then prepared his cipher to the insurance people.

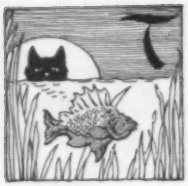
Jack Allbright started for the island. He had an anxious afternoon, but found his calculations correct. As he handed the messages to the cable operator, his eyes took in at a glance the words:

"SAY, DOC! IS IT A BOY?"

And as he read this message, referring to the momentous "transaction," Jack forgot all of his own troubles.

The Hypnotized Ship.*

BY EDWARD TH. CALNON.



THE ink was scarcely dry on his commission as a surgeon in the Portuguese navy when Dr. Jacob Willow was assigned to the cruiser *Castello Branco,* ordered to sail from Lisbon two days later. The night before her departure a small party was sent ashore to gather in a half-dozen seamen who had not returned to the ship. The Doctor joined the expedition through curiosity. On landing, a certain waterside tavern much frequented by seafaring men was visited, and it was here that he first saw Shirzahmeda.

He sat at a table before the tavern door. A flaming link stuck into an iron sconce above the entrance cast a dim and fitful light upon the "Man with Satan's Eyes," as the inn people had dubbed him. He sat on the edge of the chair in a peculiar, crouching attitude with his body huddled upon the table and his face buried in his arms. His hair was long and black. A pair of Turkish trousers showing below his Spanish cloak aroused the Doctor's curiosity to such an extent that he taxed the landlord for an account of his mysterious guest.

The innkeeper averred that he knew nothing, and, indeed, seemed fearful of even naming the bizarre stranger who had camped before his door. But as his questioner persisted, and any hope of present trade had passed with the naval party, which had gone on without the surgeon, he led Dr. Willow into a far corner of the public room of the inn.

"Always he sits like that," whispered the innkeeper with a jerk of his thumb toward the tousled form dimly seen through the open door. "But he is not asleep. Ah, no! He listens. He hears everything. He likes especially the talk of sailors. When men from ships come here to eat and drink he harkens to their every

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word. His form grows stiff and stays that way until the talking stops. He is all ears when they tell of storms and wrecks, of how to guide the ship through mountainous waves and roaring winds, of compasses and wheels, of currents that run in the sea, of icebergs and terrible cold, of parts of the ocean where it is always hot and it blisters the hands to lay them where the sun has shone. But, senhor, best of all he likes to hear them speak of India. You should see him when they tell of Bombay, Calcutta, the Ganges! Then he is not stiff like a statue in bronze. No! No! His body quivers underneath his cloak. He is like a tiger about to spring, but he holds himself in and keeps his place.

"Whence did he come? Where will he go? Why does he stay here?" The keeper of the inn shrugged his shoulders. "He is plotting, scheming, senhor, but what it is that he plots no man knows. Some monstrous mischief, doubtless.

"The devil is in his eyes, senhor, and that is why men fear him. When his eyes blaze full upon them like a lightning flash, men stand like posts, stupefied, or fall upon the ground, and when his gaze meets yours you must do his will. When he is hungry or thirsty he looks up, and if my wife or the maid fall under his sight they must run to him with bread and wine. But, unless he is hungry, he sits as now, with his eyes hid. But some day, when his plot is ripe, what terrible things may happen, senhor!"

As the innkeeper ended he cast toward his awful visitor a sidelong glance in which was a nameless fear.

The hour being late, Dr. Willow left the inn and hastened down the street. He looked back as he turned the first corner and Shirzahmeda was still there, a grotesque form that seemed to expand and contract fantastically as the flame of the link flared up for an instant and then left him in temporary darkness.

Next day the *Castello Branco* sailed westward from Lisbon, and about two months later was steaming eastward from the coast of Brazil, bound for Portugal, with orders to stop at the Azores.

The voyage had been particularly pleasant. All on board were in a jolly mood. The gay spirits of the commander, Capitão Oliveira Corvo, undoubtedly had much to do with the prevailing good humor. This officer, a sunbrowned and handsome man of forty years or thereabout, was overjoyed at the prospect of visiting

the Azores. It was no secret among the officers that Capitão Corvo was deeply enamored of Portugal's richest heiress, Doña Maria Chagas, daughter of Dom Luis Chagas. The private yacht of the Dom, bearing the Doña Maria, was to arrive at the Azores a few days before he was due there. The Doña Maria was not averse to the Capitão's suit, it was rumored, but her aristocratic father had more ambitious aims for her future.

Affairs were in this delightful but uncertain state when, on a bright August morning, word went round that a ship was coming into view. In a few minutes the cruiser's decks, rails, and lower riggings were crowded with officers and men, all gazing intently at the strangest craft that ever skimmed the sea.

It was a trim little vessel of some fifty tons. Not a sail was set. No smoke curled from her funnel. Nothing moved upon her decks. Her sharp prow cut the waves like a knife. She was headed due south, a course that would bring her across the cruiser's bows.

Suddenly an ensign, with glasses trimmed upon the mysterious craft, was heard to cry: "I know that ship! It is the yacht *Flora da Angra,* of Lisbon!"

The lines about the commander's mouth grew tense and hard. His glasses, too, were leveled at the swiftly moving vessel.

"Yes," he said, in a voice almost like a groan. "It is Dom Luis Chagas' yacht. What evil has befallen her? She is far out of her course, and to be in these waters now she can not have touched at the Azores for even an hour. But look, there are people aboard her! I see them sitting in chairs upon the deck. I see the captain on the bridge. I see sailors standing about. But they are all as motionless as statues, as still as death!"

Indeed, it could be seen with the naked eye that all the Capitão said was true. The two vessels rapidly neared each other. The yacht held to her course and slipped by under the *Castello's* bows not half a cable length away..

As the *Flora da Angra* dashed by a strange silence, as of profound awe, fell upon the other ship. What evil force held the yacht in thrall and cast its spell upon her passengers? Seated in chairs, in groups and singly, about her after-deck, were Dom Luis, his daughter and friends. Not a hand was lifted to greet the war

vessel — not a head turned to view it. The captain stood upon the bridge, his hands grasping a rail and his face set immovably toward the south. Sailors leaned upon the bulwarks or stood with hands upon the shrouds or companionway railings. It seemed as though a strange reversal of the laws of nature had overtaken the ill-fated craft. The yacht sped swiftly on her way, rising and falling gently on the waves, as though it were a thing of flesh and blood, full of life and strength. The people alone seemed inanimate, standing in their places as dull and lifeless as stones or the dead stumps of blasted trees.

Capitão Corvo was the first to arouse himself. He saw his inamorata being borne swiftly and surely toward the trackless wastes of the South Atlantic.

"They must be stopped," he shouted. "Some monstrous lethargy has fallen upon them. He must awaken them. We must attract their attention."

Thereupon arose a thunderous din. Officers and sailors sent up mighty shouts and waved their arms frantically toward the yacht. Steam whistles rent the air with piercing shrieks. A starboard cannon boomed out a deafening note and a shell ricochetted across the path of the *Flora da Angra*.

A baby's sigh could have accomplished as much as all that hubbub. Those on the yacht whose backs were toward the cruiser never turned or moved. Those who faced it continued to stare with stolid indifference. The lethean sleep which had fallen upon them, if such it were, was a deep and appalling one.

The cruiser's commander saw his beloved snatched from him and hurried by some unseen agency to a lonely and dreadful death. He ordered the ship turned in pursuit of the yacht and began the most curious race in which vessels ever participated.

A hasty consultation of officers was held and it was decided to keep up the chase until the mystery was solved. Capitão Corvo took the responsibility of ignoring his orders to proceed to the Azores. He trusted that the importance of Dom Luis Chagas to his country would outweigh any technical disobedience.

"What is the speed of the *Flora da Angra?*" asked the Capitão of the ensign who had sailed in her.

"She makes her fifteen knots an hour easily," was the reply.

"And we make our fifteen knots an hour hardly," was the bitter comment of a sub-officer.

The odds were in favor of the yacht, now half a mile ahead, with the cruiser plunging along at top speed in her wake.

By nightfall the *Flora da Angra* was two miles in the lead. She showed no lights but, as there was no indication of any change of course, it was decided to keep up the chase at full speed through the night, trusting to luck and a force of sharp-eyed lookouts not to run down the pleasure craft in the dark.

Before daybreak next morning the war vessel's decks were crowded with seamen. The Capitão paced to and fro, in misery and anxiety. What would the dawn disclose? Had the yacht changed her course during the night and so eluded pursuit? The vision of a sea that reached away on every side, empty, lonely, without a sign of any ship, rose up before him with maddening frequency.

The dawn came. While the waters of the ocean were yet dark and only the sky was gray the cry of "Ship ahoy!" rang out.

"Where away?" called an officer.

"Dead ahead," shouted the lookout.

Dead ahead all eyes were turned and there, one after another, the watchers made out a vessel. It was the *Flora da Angra*. She was about three miles distant, still headed for the south pole, and going at top speed.

Thus the race continued, day after day and night after night. Each evening found the yacht farther away than before.

On the morning of the fourth day consternation reigned on board the cruiser. There were no people on the *Flora da Angra!* Owners, sailors, guests — all had vanished from the places where they had been seen sitting or standing day after day. There had been half a gale during the night and a sea, that caused the yacht to dip and roll, was running. Had the passengers been swept off the deck of the *Flora da Angra* during the storm in the night?

Horrible thought! The distracted naval commander was almost crazed at the mere suggestion of such a catastrophe. But still he hoped, though half convinced that the cause of the craft's

sinister course was something really diabolical. And then he would swear, both long and loud, with every outlandish oath and direful curse that he had ever heard — in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English — that he would follow that ship to the gates of hell and there engage in a hand-to-hand conflict with Satan himself, if he it were who had stolen his lady-love.

On the fifth and sixth days the yacht was scarcely visible. On the seventh day it was not once seen and the commander's state of mind was dolorous indeed.

Were Dom Luis Chagas and his most lovely, charming and gracious daughter aboard the yacht, or did they lie on coral strands fathoms down under the sea? And if on the *Flora da Angra,* were they alive or dead? And what would be the fate of the yacht? The cruiser was now in the Antarctic. The air was biting cold, and icebergs alarmingly numerous. Would the yacht strike one of these and sink before it could be reached? Would she continue due south, or turn to east or west? Should the pursuer still keep her course or change it? And was it really a ship, or merely a phantom, that it pursued?

Thus Capitão Corvo raved all day while the *Castello Branco* raced toward the southern horizon, over which the yacht had disappeared.

On the eighth day, an hour after sunrise, the *Castello* again caught sight of the *Flora da Angra.* She lay due south, some fifteen miles away. Covered with new fallen snow, she seemed more of an apparition than ever. All in white, her outlines showed the same as on the first day she was sighted. For, strangest of all, her bow no longer pointed south, but east!

Capitão Corvo hastily gave orders to change the course so as to overhaul her. Then the yacht was seen to be turning north — she was coming toward the cruiser, which veered quickly toward the south again, but no sooner had this been done than the yacht headed west. The bewildered Portuguese commander was about to order another change of course when a voice sang out from the foretopmast: "She is going in a circle!"

At once it was seen that this must be so. The yacht was running about in a great ring, several miles across. This explained how her pursuer had been able to come up with her.

Swiftly the warship drew near its quarry. When but half a mile from the northernmost point of the yacht's circular course the engines were stopped and the *Castello Branco* drifted on the sea, and for two long hours watched the *Flora da Angra* as she dashed the icy spray from her bow and rushed headlong on a path that could lead nowhere. Some in wonder, some in awe, and some in very fear, all gazed in fascination upon that fairy ship. Hull and deck and masts, bowsprit and shrouds and ropes, all gleamed in the dazzling whiteness of snow and rime and frost. And when the sun broke through the clouds the whole yacht sparkled and scintillated as though made of millions of diamonds, pearls, opals and lapis-lazuli.

But the weirdest thing of all was to see this spectral ship gliding through the water with no human being to be seen on board of her. No passengers, no sailors, walked or stood about her decks — no lookout peered ahead for any sign of danger.

And as they gazed, on a sudden it seemed as though her speed grew less. Then twenty voices shouted: "She is slowing down!"

It was true. Slower and slower ran the yacht, until her motion was scarcely perceptible. Then she stopped altogether and rocked idly on the waves. "What has happened?" ran the question from one to another in terrified whispers.

"She has run out of coal!" sang out the ensign who had sailed in the yacht.

This material view from one who had walked her decks and climbed her rigging and knew the *Flora da Angra* for a bona-fide structure of timber and iron put heart into all and the unaccountable flight of the yacht lost some of its magic.

So when a long-boat was lowered in charge of a gray-haired naval lieutenant it was quickly filled with sailors, armed to the teeth, all anxious to board the *Flora da Angra* and face and conquer whatever mysterious agency held it in its spell. Dr. Willow went along to care for any sick or injured who might be on the yacht, with very particular instructions from Capitão Corvo to have an eye especially for a rarely beauteous damsel whom he could not mistake, and also for her most estimable parent.

The approach to the *Flora da Angra* was made with little

noise and much caution, but apparently attracted no attention on board the yacht. The boat came alongside of her amidships and made fast to her without accident.

One by one the boat's crew silently clambered aboard and looked about. All was as still as death. No sign of man was anywhere — no footprints in the snow upon her decks.

Resolutely they dashed to the companionway and into the saloon. The first to enter stopped short in horror. Those behind pushed forward and shoved them farther into the cabin.

For a full minute all stood there, still and breathless, shocked into silence. They were crowded into a narrow aisle, which ran between two rows of human bodies. Side by side, and close together, with faces uncovered, lay men and women, sailors, officers, richly dressed ladies, aristocratic looking men, masters, servants and guests.

But even in the dim light of the saloon, the faces of the prostrate forms did not seem to be those of dead people. A slightly flickering haze appeared to rest on or just above them, casting a pallid light upon those ghastly countenances.

Dr. Willow was the first to move, and strode between the bodies to the form of a beautiful young woman, who had the raven hair and proudly curling lips of a Portuguese belle. It was the commander's beloved.

The surgeon laid one hand upon her cheek, and one upon the forehead of her father, who lay next to her, and then recoiled as though shot.

"There is life in these bodies," he shouted. "Some powerful spell or sleep has been cast upon them."

"Then you can revive them?" asked the lieutenant in a hopeful voice.

"Not until I know the cause," Dr. Willow responded quickly. "We must search the ship."

In the engine-room was found the engineer, carefully oiling and examining the machinery, seeming to wonder why it did not go. He gave no heed, as though unaware of the visitors' presence. In the boiler-room the firemen searched the empty bunkers anxiously for coal. They neither saw nor heard. In the galley was found the ship's cook, almost hidden behind

towering piles of cakes, pastries and loaves of bread. He was vigorously kneading dough and paid no attention.

The lieutenant and surgeon were leaving the galley when a seaman rushed up with the news that there was an odd-looking man in the wheel-house. The sailor's voice shook with such evident fear that the others were infected. They stepped aside and allowed the Doctor the privilege of leading the way to the pilot-house.

He entered, and gasped in astonishment at what he saw. There, seated upon a high stool, with both hands clasped tightly to spokes of the wheel, was Shirzahmeda.

He did not sit upright on the stool, but leaned far over to the right. In falling into this uncomfortable posture he had pulled the steering wheel over. He must have sat thus a day and a night, during which time the yacht pursued its circular course until the engines stopped.

"This man is Shirzahmeda," Dr. Willow whispered to the seamen. "He is a marvelous hypnotist. He has placed every one of the yacht's company under his influence. We must blindfold him first of all, for, with one glance of his eyes, he would hypnotize us all!"

The surgeon arranged a pea-jacket in the form of a bag and on the instant that he slipped it over the man's head four stout seamen seized his arms and legs. He struggled like a madman until they got him out of the wheel-house and pinned his squirming form face downward on the deck.

There, in a twinkling, he was securely trussed. Bound hands and feet, arms and legs, and with the pea-jacket hood strapped tightly over his eyes, he was lowered into the long-boat.

Attention was then turned to the people of the yacht, the Doctor's own efforts being devoted to reviving Dom Luis and his daughter. A small army of the cruiser's men, acting under his direction, worked over the captain, officers, sailors and guests. At the end of three hours every one had been restored to consciousness and had taken a little nourishment. All were greatly weakened by their long sleep, but were out of danger.

The yacht's people were then transferred to the cruiser. Darkness had fallen, and both ships lay to for the night. At dawn

a heavy treasure chest was brought from the *Flora da Angra* and the yacht set out under sail, in charge of her own captain, for Buenos Ayres, for coal.

Great was the astonishment of Dom Luis Chagas and his friends when the story of their remarkable voyage and rescue was recounted. The grateful plutocrat, with the politest oaths of aristocratic Portuguese, swore that Capitão Corvo was the most gallant sailor on the sea and must marry his daughter. With this promise of wedding bells soon to ring, and with two such happy lovers on board, every one was in a joyous mood and the voyage almost like a honeymoon.

Much speculation was indulged in concerning the actions and designs of Shirzahmeda. He had seen the treasure chest put on board the yacht in the harbor at Lisbon, it was decided, and had stowed himself away on the vessel, only to appear on deck when well out to sea and hypnotize every one as he met them. He had then attempted to navigate the craft, probably in search of his long-dreamed-of India. What fantasies had surged through that mysterious brain, what visions of empire, power and wealth when he should reach the Orient, may never be known.

At Lisbon Shirzahmeda was imprisoned. Not for long, however. Dr. Willow saw him a month later, standing by the Black Horse statue, as ragged a beggar as any of his fellows. Something had happened in prison — an accident, perhaps — for Shirzahmeda's right eye had been removed. His left optic still flashed in anger and hate, but alone it had no power to frighten or command. He is probably there to this day.

"But why," some one may ask, "why did Shirzahmeda sail the yacht in a circle? Why did he sit there on the stool and allow himself to be taken so easily?"

In glancing about the pilot-house Shirzahmeda caught sight of himself in a mirror. He gazed into his own eyes with a growing fascination. He stared a second too long, however. He had hypnotized himself.

The Fear Motif.*

BY ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD.

CHUZENJI the beautiful is a placid sheet of water enclosed by volcanic mountains, whose slopes are firm and pure in line, like master strokes from a giant brush.

Sumner Boyd had been attracted by the quaint fishing village, whose balconies overhang the lake—the old temple, with its mossy steps and giant gate—the odd little boats, with their naked rowers, and the stately sampans that sailed gravely by. He decided to spend a summer there, lonely though it would undoubtedly be. In the spring he engaged a bungalow fronting the high road, backing toward the water, and bounded to left and right by ample gardens. Here he set up his household gods. He even went to the extreme of bringing up a piano—a tough, weather-proof little upright. It had to be transported by oxen from the railway at Nikko. And great was the amusement of his friends at the venture, greater yet the wonder of servants and town folk when it was unpacked. It was set up in the main room, which opened toward the road. Above it and to right and left Boyd hung three mirrors, reflecting what passed behind him while he played. He had not struck a dozen chords before many auditors gathered, and, as he did not appear to observe them, gave themselves free rein. They evidently thought the performance absurd; they grimaced and laughed, frankly expressing their judgments of the uncouth din.

But whatever they may have felt, the instrument was a comfort to its owner. When Boyd's friends came to console him in his solitude, the little mirrors would reflect emotions far different from the laughter and derision of the Japanese. Often it was an old song or a time-worn hymn he was asked for; then,

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as he played or sang he saw many a look of homesickness—many a smile, half tears, in the betraying mirrors.

One summer afternoon—during the great pilgrimage to Nantai San, Nikko's holy mountain—Boyd sat at his instrument, intently curious over the shifting visions in the mirrors. Past the door and upward led the road upon which trooped the pilgrims, with mushroom hats, white robes, staffs, bare, dusty ankles and sandal-shod feet. They passed in groups and singly—sad and merry, old and young—in endless procession.

Unconsciously he began to play the Pilgrim Chorus from Tannhäuser, though the joyous, happy band outside was far from embodying the grief-worn spirits of Wagner's opera. Though half conscious of the incongruity, even of the absurdity, of the music in this scene, he kept on with the theme, becoming more and more rapt as it developed. The passing figures in the glass dimmed and blurred, and at last, concentrated into a single care-worn face, deep lined by haggard suffering—a face prematurely old, lit with desperate eagerness. A moment more brought the realization that the pathetic vision was no creature of the imagination, but a reflection from the real world of the dusty thoroughfare outside.

A man was sitting on the edge of the veranda, looking in. His was the face reflected in the glass. He did not see the mirror that revealed him; he was, indeed, utterly unconscious of all save the music. His dress was that of the poorest native; but no native would have been affected by that song. Boyd played the Chorus to the end, then drifted off through chord after chord, trying old, familiar melodies. He played "Home, Sweet Home," "Die Wacht am Rhine," "Santa Lucia." The man showed no recognition, but the haunting look of soul starvation in his face deepened to agony.

Under that peasant's dress surely lay a mystery. Boyd became keen to discover it. Could he but touch with his music the hidden chord of feeling, the stranger would reveal himself. The musician experimented — with simple songs, those to which the heart-strings of memory vibrate — but with no success.

At last, made impatient by failure, he turned and made a gesture of invitation, "Won't you come in?"

Instantly the man flushed, rose and hurried away.

"Maté! maté!" called Boyd. "Stop, stop!"

Half a dozen white-clad pilgrims paused and turned to him with smiling faces. The man skurried on, disappearing at a turn of the road. Boyd was mystified.

The next day brought a similar experience—this time the pilgrim would not venture so near the house. His reflected image could be seen as he sat on the other side of the road, ready for instant flight—intent upon the music, nevertheless, with a pitiful insistency—a look half beseeching, half terrified.

He sat there all the afternoon, while his puzzled entertainer played. But when Boyd rose, the listener vanished.

That was the last seen of him for some days. Then came the beginning of a strange companionship.

As time passed, there grew upon the lonely American at Chuzenji the sensation of being haunted. He never sat down to his piano without the feeling of a presence near him. Sometimes the form of the vanishing pilgrim flitted across the glass. But always when search was made the road and the garden were deserted—there seemed no place for a man to hide.

Gradually Boyd became accustomed to his invisible auditor. At last he came to crave his presence as a stimulus to his playing. There was a weird enchantment in the mysterious proximity of the spirit he could feel answering to every note. One must live through it, as Boyd had, to know that intense yearning for the music of one's own people, the desire that comes when the only music to be had is that of alien instruments—the only songs, the inharmonious carollings of incomplete scales. There was no mistaking the eyes of the man. All the lures that Boyd put forward, however, were of no avail—the Unknown persisted in his unaccountable conduct. The mystery deepened.

October came, and with it return to Yokohama and business interests. "Must" is a cruel mistress. At last goods and chattels were packed and crated, the piano sent coastward—and Boyd slept his last night in the dismantled house. The persistent presence of the shadow filled the bare rooms, seemed to whisper outside the paper shoji with the restless, unhappy question of an uneasy spirit. All next day the traveller was

possessed by an uncomfortable suspicion that he was followed. At Nikko he felt freer, but no sooner was he settled in the "City Athwart the Beach," than the invisible audience again made its presence known.

At this juncture came Pentanoff, the Hungarian pianist, on his tour around the world, and, having letters of introduction, was everywhere fêted and entertained.

Boyd's musical inclinations and piano brought them much together. The virtuoso was a pale little man, with a shock of fuzzy hair and an impetuous manner. His mother was an English woman, and, besides his mastery of what was literally his "mother tongue," he had inherited from her a certain poise and gentle directness unusual in his hot-headed race.

One night, in Sumner's bungalow, as the two sat over their coffee and cigars, the host told of his weird experience.

"I'm sure he's near us now!" he exclaimed, as he finished the tale. "I am vividly conscious of him, though where he keeps himself is a mystery."

Pentanoff was all interest. "Not German, French, nor English, you say? — nor American, or he would have answered to all three — Scandinavian?"

"I don't think so."

"Russian?"

"No, — I tried the Russian hymn — if anything, that hymn scared him away."

"I wonder — " said Pentanoff, tapping with tuneful finger a minor note — Then rapidly, nervously, slamming the music stool into position, he settled himself, and plunged into the ringing measures of a Polish battle hymn. How he played! Boyd felt an electrifying thrill. He could not keep still, he rose and walked about the room. That tormenting, irresistible music ran riot in his blood. He wanted a forlorn hope to lead — a height to storm — a dash to death with drawn sabre, in some mad charge for liberty!

The hysteria of the passionate song shook him like a great wind. He turned — and came face to face with his Chuzenji Tannhäuser! Great tears coursed down the man's cheeks. He turned to speak — only dry sobs came. Pentanoff heard, and

whirled around. The musician spoke in a language Boyd did not understand.

The man threw himself on his knees in a passion of weeping. It was some moments before he controlled himself.

Pentanoff received then a merciful inspiration. Turning to the piano, he played gentle, half-savage airs, strange, thrilling songs of the infancy of a people — the simplest, sweetest, saddest in the world. They soothed like an enchantment, the poor creature at his feet. Gradually the scalding tears gave place to gentle sobs of childlike relief, infinitely pitiful — then silence.

Again the musician spoke, his eyes, with gentle test, intent upon the keyboard. The answer came, hesitating, halting.

"Would you mind," Pentanoff said, "leaving us alone?"

Boyd reluctantly left the room and far into the night he heard the hum of voices — then more of the strange eerie music.

Dawn had almost come when Pentanoff rejoined him.

"It's very sad!" he said.

"Tell me," demanded the host after a lengthened silence. "Am I to be 'pied piper' against my will, and not know why?"

"It's very sad!" he repeated. "His whole story is disconnected — a sort of patchwork of memory — and there are hopeless rents in it. He is my countryman. He was a Nihilist." Again Pentanoff lapsed into silence, an odd look in his inscrutable eyes. "An official in his district," he resumed at length, "had become obnoxious to the Association, and was condemned. The Circle, of which your man was a member, was called upon to furnish the murderer. They drew lots, and it fell to him — Fate is such an ironical dame! He was the first violin in the most popular orchestra, and it was decided that the offender might be shot at one of the balls which it was known they would both attend. Unfortunately for the Society, chance had not chosen wisely, the avenger had a gentle soul — he was weak — he couldn't do it. I wish you had heard him describe it. I feel as if I had lived it all myself, or dreamt it in a nightmare. He sat through the evening, his violin trembling in his hand, his revolver lying in his breast. Dance after dance went by, and still he did not shoot. He pictured it to himself, as he pictured it to me — how the man would fall — how that bril-

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liant gathering would rise in screaming disorder — how he would be seized — perhaps not have time to empty another cartridge into his own brain! He saw it over and over again while the lights winked and glared at him, and perspiration hung chill at his temples. He could not kill in cold blood!

"He was ordered to play a solo. He determined that this once — this the last time, he would play — and then — he would make an end of it. He improvised — tearing out from his soul all that terrible day of fear had held for him. He lost trace of everything but his music, and his misery. He paused. The audience he had held spellbound burst into a roar of applause. The host sent him his own glass of wine, the hostess her gold bracelet. He was dazed for a few moments, then the mists cleared — and he saw that his man had gone!

"Vaguely he murmured the name. Some one told him that the official had received a message which called him away. The rest of the evening is a blank. He remembers only stumbling into the outside darkness.

"According to his code of honor he must give himself up to the Society. That meant a disgrace he could not bear — and death! — that he feared with overpowering terror. He went home, secured his little savings, and fled.

"Realizing that his fellow-conspirators would leave nothing undone to find him, and make an example of him as a renegade and coward, he lived panic stricken — hiding, running, starving for days at a time, possessed by a Fear that daily grew upon him. Of course, he overestimated the power of the secret organization — all its members do. But he had been trained in its narrow circle till it made the bounds for his world.

"He does not seem to know how long, or where, he wandered, but after months of anguished flight he reached the sea coast, and concealed himself in a vessel whose destination he did not even guess. She was an English tramp, bound for the China ports, Yokohama her last call, he learned when hunger forced him on deck. He was impressed as stoker. They did not put him off at Calcutta, as they had threatened, but let him work his way to Japan. Even on board the ship he did not feel himself safe from the grasp of the men whose confidence he had be-

trayed. He lived in apprehension. His mind was already in the clutch of the fixed idea — the monomania of the hunted.

"When he reached the farthest East, he was terrified at prospect of the return voyage. He thought of embarking for America, and had almost completed arrangements for that, when he imagined he recognized a face in the crowd — fancied he saw a hand make the signal of his Society! Mad with fear, he fled, wandering and begging — ever making for remoter regions. Reaching the mountains, he buried himself in a little village of charcoal burners.

"There he lived ten years, perhaps longer. He picked up the language and gradually became identified with the people, who accepted him at first with curiosity, at last with friendship, ever with uniform gentleness.

"The Fear was with him always, though its cause had after a time vanished from his clouded mind. Only one longing, one need, remained clear and persistent — music! He strung a samisen to a European scale, and worked with the koto, but their tinklings were a poor solace.

"In his restlessness he began journeying, following pilgrimages from place to place, till he happened to fall in with the Nantai San procession. Suddenly — you can imagine what it must have been to him — out of the blur of white road and dusty, blue shadows, came the long lost tones — the melodies for which his heart hungered. He was drawn to them as by a spell. Memories sprang to life! faint and indistinct at first, dim visions of another existence. He followed the sounds till he came to your veranda, and sat there looking in at the strange, yet familiar instrument. Slowly he drank in harmonies, long forgotten, long sought for. When at last you rose and spoke to him, the old terror smote his heart, and he fled.

"But the music drew him back. He would often crouch under the little porch, listening with all his soul. In those long summer months his mind was born again — but the dread remained. When you went away, he followed you.

"To-night — but you know the rest — the final awakening came. He was exhausted. I played him to sleep at last. He's in there now, poor wretch! Think of it — what a life!"

The two men sat silent. For the moment they entered that strange existence of fear and longing — understood the unutterable effort of that numbed brain working through a labyrinth of darkness, guided only by the slender thread of sound — leading slowly out into the light!

Pentanoff rose. "I'll come back in the morning," he said, "to talk over what we had best do. Leave the poor devil where he is; let him alone — I've made him comfortable, and he'll sleep for twenty-four hours at least."

Bidding his friend good-night, Boyd went to his room and to bed, falling into a heavy doze, from which he suddenly awoke. He was sitting bolt upright in his bed, startled. He was sure he had heard some strange noise. It came again — three great chords on the piano! The suddenness of the awakening had confused him. For some moments he was at a loss to account for the sounds in the room beneath. His feet slipped to the floor — then a rush of music held him still and silent.

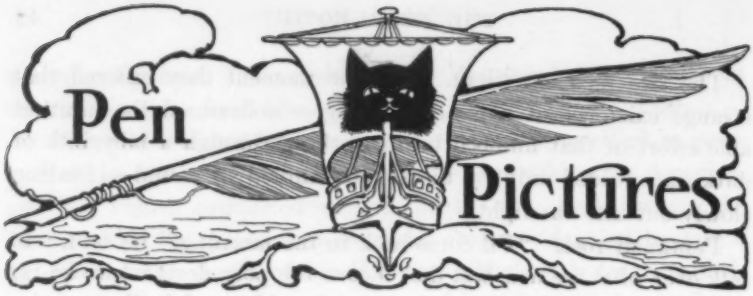
What was it? — this overwhelming uprising of sound? Terror, terror, abject terror! in every note. Then fragments of longing, yearning — reminiscent melodies — and again Fear, smiting, all-benumbing Fear!

Boyd swayed back and forth, blinded with tears. Again and again he tried to rise, but sank down trembling.

A crash — a discord, that seemed to break the very heart of the instrument — then silence, through which the last chord hummed in a roaring circle of sound.

Snatching his dressing-gown, Boyd ran to the sitting-room. The swinging lamp that hung from the ceiling was turned low, and threw distorted, gigantic shadows as it swung slightly to and fro in the draught of the opened door. The room at first glance seemed empty — but across the keyboard of the piano, lay huddled a limp shape — one arm hanging idly, the other bent under the drooping head.

Slowly the body lost balance; sinking, collapsing to the floor. The thread in the labyrinth was broken!



The Weirdest Land on Earth.*

No. III.

The Gathering of the Golden Fleece.

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

For nine months of the year Nature runs a continuous gray film before the eyes of the Australian bush dwellers, and their brains rust under the appalling loneliness.

Then comes the awakening. One morning the news flashes over the continent that the early sheds have started to shear, and a thrill goes through the land. The Outback awakes. The sheep raiser almost forgets the crow and the rabbit, and views his lot cheerfully. The overland tracks echo to the hoofs of the shearer's hack and the accompanying pack horse. The dust-covered Sundowner, with billy-can, flour-bag and swag, trudges forward hopefully. The news spreads over the land like an inspiriting battle cry. It is wool time. It is harvest time. The Golden Fleece is falling, and the good days have begun. More than one-fourth of all the sheep on the globe are to be shorn and a wool crop valued at more than one hundred million dollars is to be harvested. The whole world is interested in this crop, because the whole world is the purchaser.

The mill hand in England, who is working half time through lack of raw material, is praying for the arrival of the fleeces that the army of suntanned shearers is stripping from the blocks on the Darling Downs twelve thousand miles away. A fresh supply of wool means six days work a week and food for his

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starving family. French and German mill owners curse the slow tramp steamers whose blunt-nosed bows plough leisurely northwards with the first shipments from the early sales. Wool means wealth to them.

And Australia must sell. She has no mills of her own; she is but the producer of the raw product. True, part of it comes back in cloth and clothing for the wool king and his family, but he does not trouble about that. He is not a political economist. He grows wool and the world wants wool. Therefore, when the hundred million fleeces are offered in the Wool Exchange at Sydney and Melbourne, buyers of all nations are there and shout and scream like maniacs in their endeavors to secure choice lots.

They are wide-awake men, these wool buyers. They have come from the corners of the earth to fill big commissions. When the deep sea cables carry up into the northland the news that the Queensland sheds have started to shear, the Land of the Kangaroo becomes a magnet. It is the signal to the Jasons who have bank-notes to exchange for the Golden Fleece. In England, Germany, France, Austria, Japan, and the United States, men, who blindfolded can tell the different grades of wool by the touch of their sensitive fingers, hurriedly consult the steamship timetables and rush down the long trail to the sunbaked Commonwealth. The wool king wants money. The mill owner wants wool. The mill hand wants work, and the world wants clothing. So into all the manufacturing centres of the old world roll the big bales branded Tangmangaroo, Currabudgerie, Boonoo Boonoolong, Warregarilong, and the thousand and one other places with the musical aboriginal names where the merino flourishes.

The shearing call brings mighty musterings in Australia. The wool army concentrates. Muscular Maorilanders swing up five hundred leagues from New Zealand; Tasmania sends her battalions; the Riverina "ringers" from the Murray and Murrumbidger with record tallies as knights of the shears, move to the scene of activity, and mounted Snowy River veterans from the south, who, as Rough Riders, have no peers on the face of the globe, again meet men from the Gulf of Carpentaria that

they have not heard of since last shearing.

> "And the Snowy River riders on those hills have made their home,
> Where the river runs the giant cliffs between;
> I have seen full many a rider since I first began to roam,
> But never yet such riders have I seen."

From the shearing sheds ascends a sweet song of toil. The weird silence is broken. The homesteads are camping grounds for happy armies. The cracking of whips, the shouting of men, the barking of dogs, and the baa-ing of the penned thousands that await their turn, goes up in a chant that thrills. It is the song the woolman's brain associates with cash and comfort, with the yearly trip to the glittering city, with a flutter at Randwick or Flemington race tracks — it is the Song of Wool. He has waited for it, longed for it, prayed for it. When the attacks of drought and fire, crow and rabbit, have seemed unendurable, it has proved the blessed memory that nerved him to fresh efforts. When the sun has peered like a bleary eye through the smoke pall of the advancing bush fires, he recalled the click of the shears, the strumming of the banjos in the twilight, the songs of Warrego Jack and Saltbush Bill, and he fought on. Memories play a big part in the doing of brave deeds.

The Australian shearer is a working man apart. America possesses no class with which he may be compared. He is the most independent worker in the world. He shears at a price fixed by his Union. His sheds are booked ahead. The sheep-breeder must answer to the Union for any unfair treatment. He does not take kindly to orders. He considers himself the equal of the wool king. He receives his check as each shed finishes, or "cuts out" in plain Australianese, and he thinks the compliment is on the side of his employer.

The Australian Shearers' Union is one of the most powerful labor organizations in the world. It controls its own newspaper. It has the support of the Parliamentary Labor Party in both State and Federal Parliaments. By its influence shearers have time and again been elected as representatives of the people. It is a thorn in the side of the pastoralists.

The shearers as a body are a class that any country might be proud of. They are sunburnt, sinewy men whose capacity for

work is tremendous. A man shears from one hundred to two hundred and fifty sheep a day according to the heaviness of the fleece. But two hundred and fifty is not high-water mark. "Ringers," as the record men are called, have carried the day's score to over three hundred, a feat that seems impossible when one considers that each sheep must pass the eye of the "boss of the board." It is only on the smaller sheep runs that the old-fashioned hand shears are now used. In all the large sheds these have been replaced by the shearing machine operated by compressed air, by means of which a shearer can double the records made with the old-fashioned blade. Forty, sixty and eighty shearers working in one shed is no uncommon sight. The wool rolls back like foam before the machine and the sheep has hardly recovered from his astonishment at being roughly seized and thrown, before he is put aside, looking woefully thin and scrawny after the operation. They are workers, these men. With a thermometer over the hundred mark, and stripped to trousers and singlet, they rip the fleeces from the "jumbucks" with lightning rapidity. Each strives for the honor of being the "ringer" of the shed, but the boss has a quick eye for slummed work. They never straighten their backs till the whistle blows, and all day long the white fleeces roll away from the blade — the white fleeces that the mill hand twelve thousand miles away is anxiously praying for.

The "pickers up" and roustabouts bundle the wool into huge sacks that are compressed and branded and loaded on the waiting teams that swing towards the nearest railway station, perhaps twenty, thirty or even fifty miles away. The teamsters must hurry. The world wants wool.

"With lash and lurid order,
They will swing across the Border,
The dust upon the lading making extra weight to pull,
And the drunken township loafer,
Staggers blindly from the sofa,
Just to cheer the first team over with the Thurulgoona wool."

It is a perfect cyclone of energy that sweeps over the continent. The buyers are waiting. The tramp steamers are rocking in the waters of Port Jackson and Port Philip, anxious for their cargoes. The army of shearers, with cooks, "pickers up"

and roustabouts in its train, sweeps through the land, leaving millions of shorn sheep in its wake. There is no idling. The world wants wool. The country correspondents telegraph the news that they have "cut out" at Burrawadgerie, Currendooley, Jembaicumbene, Illililiwa, and all the great sheep runs that dot the outback territory, and before the city man is aware of the tremendous work going on in the interior, one hundred million sheep have been stripped of their coats.

Then the army disperses. The bush roads are deserted. The stillness reigns again over the lonely homesteads. The crow notes the leanness of the shorn sheep and wonders. The Sundowner walks wearily. The Sundowner, that typical character of the Australian bush, who has earned his title by the regularity with which he times his arrival at each homestead so that he can beg an evening meal and the use of the travelers' hut. The wool king takes a flying trip to town and then returns to face another year of bitter hardship.

But up in Europe they are busy. The mill hand is happy, and praying as he works that the sheep on the Darling Downs will grow record fleeces for the next year. He is working full time, and his children are well fed.

NOTE: The fourth Pen Picture of The Weirdest Land on Earth will appear in THE BLACK CAT for May. It will deal with the dwellers of the grim interior.

"CATECHISMS"

Hand to Mouth Hints for those who thirst for the Milk of Human Kindness, and Heart to Heart Talks that will lead them from the Wrong Road into the Right Path.

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Will you suggest a little story illustrating the reward of perseverance that you think will interest my Sabbath School class? — ANNABELLE.

Once upon a time two frogs, in search of richer feeding ground, jumped into a bucket of cream they found standing in a brook.

"May as well give up," wailed one, after floundering about, vainly trying to get out, "We're goners!"

"Keep on paddling," counselled the other, "And we'll get there!"

"No use," came from number one, "too thick to swim, too thin to jump, too slippery to crawl; bound to die anyway, may as well die to-night." And he sank to the bottom and kicked the bucket.

His companion doggedly kept on paddling, paddling, paddling. The next morning found him perched on a mass of butter, eagerly disposing of the flies that came swarming from all directions. He got there!

I am a Divinity Student and intend to spend my vacation at the home of my betrothed, at Hell's Half Acre, Maine. I am afraid I shall be asked to preach at the local church, and as I have not yet reached the point where I can prepare my own sermons, would you kindly suggest a suitable one? — OBADIAH.

We are sure that the story of Mother Hubbard as told in the following sermon will go straight to the hearts of your listeners.

"Brethren, the words of my text are:

"'Old Mother Hubbard, she went to the cupboard,
To get her poor dog a bone;
But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.'

"These beautiful words, dear friends, carry with them a solemn lesson. I propose this evening to analyze their meaning, and to attempt to apply it, lofty as it may be, to our every-day life.

"Mother Hubbard, you see, was old; there being no mention of others, we may presume she was alone; a widow — a friendless, old, solitary widow. Yet did she despair? Did she sit down and weep, or read a novel, or wring her hands? No! *she went to the cupboard.* And here observe that she *went* to the cupboard. She did not hop, or skip, or run, or jump, or use any other peripatetic artifice she solely and merely *went* to the cupboard.

"We have seen that she was old and lonely, and we now further see that she was poor. For, mark, the words are *'the* cupboard,' not 'one of the cupboards,' or the 'right-hand cupboard,' or the 'left-hand cupboard,' or the one above, or the one below, or the one under the stair, but just *the* cupboard,— the one little humble cupboard the poor widow possessed. And why did she go to the cupboard? Was it to bring forth golden goblets, or glittering precious stones, or costly apparel, or feasts, or any other attributes of wealth? *It was to get her poor dog a bone!* Not only was the widow poor, but her dog, the sole prop of her age, was poor too. We can imagine the scene: the poor dog crouching in the corner, looking wistfully at the solitary cupboard, and the widow going to that cupboard — in hope, in expectation may

be, to open it, although we are not distinctly told that it was not half open or ajar — to open it for the dog.

"'But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.'

"'When she got there!' You see, dear brethren, what perseverance is. You see the beauty of persisting in doing right. *She got there.* There were no turnings and twistings, no slippings and slidings, no leaning to the right or faiterings to the left. With glorious simplicity we are told *she got there.*

"And how was her noble effort rewarded?

"'The cupboard was bare!' It was bare. There were to be found neither oranges, nor cheesecakes, nor penny buns, nor gingerbread, nor crackers, nor nuts, nor lucifer matches. The cupboard was bare! There was but one, only one, solitary cupboard in the whole of that cottage, and that one, the sole hope of the widow and the glorious load-star of the poor dog, was bare! Had there been a leg of mutton, a loin of lamb, a fillet of veal, even a box of Lowney's chocolates or a cake of Sapolio, the case would have been different, the incident would have been otherwise; but it was bare, my brethren, bare as a bald head, bare as an infant born without a caul!

"Many of you will probably say, with all the pride of wordly sophistry, 'the widow, no doubt, went out and bought a dog biscuit.' Ah, no! Far removed from these earthly ideas, these mundane desires, poor Mother Hubbard, the widow, whom many thoughtless worldlings would despise, in that she only owned one cupboard, perceived — or I might even say saw — at once the relentless logic of the situation, and yielded to it with all the heroism of that nature which had enabled her without deviation to reach the barren cupboard. She did not attempt, like the stiff-necked scoffers of this generation, to war against the inevitable; she did not try, like the so-called men of science, to explain what she did not understand. She did nothing. The poor dog had none! And then at this point our information ceases. But do we not know sufficient? Are we not cognizant of enough?

"Would we dare to pierce the veil that shrouds the ulterior fate of Old Mother Hubbard, the poor dog, the cupboard, or the bone that was not there? Must we imagine her still standing at the open cupboard door, or depict to ourselves the dog still dropping his disappointed tail upon the floor — the sought-for bone still remaining somewhere else? Ah no, my dear brethren! we are not so permitted to attempt to read the future. Suffice it for us to glean from this beautiful story its many lessons; suffice it for us to apply them, to study them as far as in us lies, and, bearing in mind the natural frailty of our nature, to avoid being widows; to shun the patronymic of Hubbard; to have, if our means afford it, more than one cupboard in the house, and to keep stores in them all. And oh! dear friends, keeping in recollection what we have learned this day, let us avoid keeping dogs that are fond of bones. But, brethren, if we do — if fate has ordained that we should do any of these things—let us then go, as Mother Hubbard did, straight, without curveting or prancing, to our cupboard, empty though it be— let us, like her, accept the inevitable with calm steadfastness; and should we, like her, ever be left with a hungry dog and an empty cupboard, may future chroniclers be able to write also of us, in the beautiful words of our text—

"'And so the poor dog had none.'"